

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 24, 2005

The Hon. Tom Ridge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C.

The Hon. Norman Mineta
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington D.C.

Dear Secretary Ridge and Mineta:

In previous correspondence, we have raised concerns regarding the Departments' efforts relating to the security of rail cars carrying hazardous materials. After the train accident earlier this month in Graniteville, South Carolina, we wrote both of you to express our concerns about the Administration's lack of a comprehensive plan to protect the nation's freight rail system from terrorist attacks.

On January 18, 2005, the U.S. Conference of Mayors sent you a letter signed by fifty-three of its members requesting that the Departments take immediate action to develop a system to notify cities and towns when hazardous materials are shipped through their jurisdictions. We support this letter from the nation's mayors and request that you take action immediately on it.


This is not the first request made by our mayors. One month after the September 11th attacks, they asked the federal government to notify them when dangerous rail shipments were shipped through their towns and cities so that they could prepare and respond to any incident or accident that might occur. This request stemmed, in part, from a known desire by Al-Qaeda to attack our rail systems. More than three years have passed since their initial request and yet the Departments have failed to act. Failure to protect Americans from attacks against our rail systems would be inexcusable.


The Department of Homeland Security already requires information on cargo to be submitted twenty-four hours before a container is placed on a ship. The Department also requires that all U.S. bound vessels submit vessel, crew, and cargo information to DHS ninety-six hours before the vessel arrives at a U.S. port. If the Department can

place notification requirements on the maritime industry, surely it can do the same with the rail industry.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please have your staff contact Al Thompson of the Homeland Security Committee Democratic Staff at 226-2616.

Sincerely,


Bernie Thompson


Edward Markey


Eleanor Holmes Norton